

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

by

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A THESIS

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MASTER OF FINE ARTS


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Final Visual Presentation

submitted by RICHARD DAVID SMOLINSKI in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art.

The University of Alberta

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I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections,
University of Alberta, as part of the Master of Fine Arts Thesis Collection:

| TITLE | DATE | MEDIUM | SIZE |
|--------------------|------|--|---------------|
| CATCH AS CATCH CAN | 1998 | OIL, CHARCOAL ACRYLIC, PAPER ON MASONITE | H 48" x W 96" |

DETAILS from the BIG PICTURE

In a contemporary context dominated by access to an overwhelming amount of information and addicted to the instant gratification of every whim, I am reluctant to ere in favour of either extreme. I have no great desire to give the impression of evidence through the sheer force of weight, nor provide easy answers for the habitually spoon-fed. Ideally, this statement will simply provide some additional information that the interested may use as an approach to thinking about the work, without it either inhibiting or limiting the possible interpretations that may seem apparent. The work may or may not speak for itself, but it exists as a tool of thought most importantly in dialogue rather than oration.

Appearances are often deceptive. Although the format for the presentation of this exhibition could be accurately described as traditional drawing and painting, the body of work evolved in many ways like a fragmentary novel or drama. This comparison to text-based forms of communication is appropriate, because many of the works in the exhibition began with their 'titles'. I collect titles from many sources, quotations that I have read, bits of overheard speech, and the results of word games I obsessively play to pass the time. I have a ledger specifically dedicated to this singular purpose. Each of these 'titles' suggests or invokes a visual or pictorial scenario, which is attempted in a variety of drawing and painting media. The act of painting or drawing can either expand or obliterate the original textual source, as well as suggesting further verbal possibilities which in turn become directions for additional visual explorations.

Perhaps because of the great influence theatre, history and literature has had upon me and the extent to which these areas of study concern human interrelations, these visual representations tend to be figurative. The individual becomes the nexus through which strands of narrative and story are transferred and it is through the situational relationships which dominate human interaction that life can be said to take place. In the context of this interaction, a recognizable cast of characters (a hare, a herring, a burning servant, the Poohbah) asserts its existence and demands an elaboration of their circumstances. The related scenes or instances convey a worldview dominated by the ritualistic transactions and negotiations which govern the individual's relationship with society. The separate paintings are not truly autonomous objects, but fractions of a whole, each piece examining a different facet of the social structure: from the skylight down to the sinkhole. At issue are the questions of dignity, integrity and self-determination. Choices must be made, but it is a milieu of coercion and the shadows of reprisal are falling in every corner. Lamps and flames offer slight illumination of the inherent hierarchies, but are more conspicuous by their menace. No one enters the food chain at the top and only one guy gets to wear the Fez. There are a few comfortable chairs around the table, but there are many more serving trays. The symbolic and thematic elements do not so much evolve as accrete. There is a lack of linear progress or a straight-forward chain of causality, only a reiteration and repetition of the struggle through each juxtaposition of imagery. In many ways the series evolves of its own volition and with a malignant interior momentum. My role in its propagation is not unlike that of certain authors of character and situation driven texts who consider their works not so much purposefully written, as recorded.

RICHard SMOLinski

Details from the Big Picture-Slide Illustrations

- 1) A Comedy of Airs or What You Will (1998) acrylic, charcoal, ink, canvas. 55" x 50 1/2".
- 2) Installation View Ground Floor West Space North Wall: The Cassandra Complex/Capitulation/
An Illustration
- 3) Installation View Ground Floor West Space South Wall and False Wall: Hysterical Re-Enactment/
Hoarder's Dilemma
- 4) Hysterical Re-Enactment (1998) acrylic, canvas. 68" x 80".
- 5) Installation View Ground Floor Centre Space North Wall: The Dictatorship of the Banal/Deathbed
Convergence
- 6) Installation View Ground Floor Centre Space East Wall: Test of Faith & Depth/ Workers' Playtime or
the Perks of Servitude
- 7) Test of Faith & Depth (1998) acrylic, ink, canvas. 84" x 60".
- 8) "David" or a Nice Clean Break (1998) acrylic, canvas. 60" x 96".
- 9) Installation View Ground Floor East Space West Wall: The Calling/ Stunt Double/ The Commission
- 10) The Commission (1998) acrylic, ink, canvas. 60"x 96".
- 11) Installation View Ground Floor East Space East Wall: Reason d'oubtful/ The Temple of the Hare
- 12) Installation View Second Floor Top of Stairs: In Summation/ Hierarchy Concerning Debasement/
Monumental Sketch/ The Chair or a Trickle Down Ecomedy
- 13) The Chair or a Trickle Down Ecomedy (1998) acrylic, ink, charcoal, graphite, canvas. 89" x 29".
- 14) Installation View Second Floor Long South Wall: Hare I,II,III,IV/ Lightbulb I & II/ Standing Lamp
- 15) Installation View Second Floor North Wall: Servile Fantasy II/ The Resignation/ Servile Fantasy I
- 16) Catch as Catch Can (1998) oil, alkyd, paper, masonite. 48" x 96".
- 17) Installation View Second Floor Short South Wall: Delugional Rumour/ J'accuse/ Figurehead
- 18) A Generous Offer or a Red Herring (1998) acrylic, masonite. 55" x 43".
- 19) Installation View East Foyer: 3 Sketches from Abandoned Epic Portrait of the Board of Governors/
Latin for 'Ignorant of Everything'/ Down the Hatch/ Handpuppet and Matching Slave/ A Lure/
In the Documentary Style or An Amplification of the Struggle/ Engineering the People's Novella
- 20) An Amphitheatre for the Elect (1998) oil, alkyd, charcoal, paper, masonite. 72" x 48".

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